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AUTHOR Lashway, Larry
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ABSTRACT

Principals today are expected to maximize their schools' performances with limited resources while also adopting educational innovations. This synopsis reviews five recent publications that offer some important insights about the nature of principals' leadership strategies: (1) "Leadership Styles and Strategies" (Larry Lashway); (2) "Facilitative Leadership: How Principals Lead without Dominating" (David T. Conley and Paul Goldman); (3) "Symbols and Symbolic Activity" (Terrence E. Deal); (4) "The Leadership Paradox: Balancing Logic and Artistry in Schools" (Terrence E. Deal and Kent D. Peterson); and (5) "Forceful Leadership and Enabling Leadership: You Can Do Both" (Robert E. Kaplan). Lashway reviews the recent literature on leadership styles and strategies, and concludes that effective leadership is built on three basic strategies: hierarchical, transformational, and facilitative. Conley and Goldman describe the rationale behind facilitative leadership, offering a candid discussion of its advantages and disadvantages. Deal discusses strategies that emphasize the leader's role as a manager of meaning, suggesting ways in which to build a school culture that will invite loyalty and commitment. Deal and Peterson offer a prescription for reconciling and integrating the multiple demands of technical leadership and symbolic leadership. Kaplan discusses "forceful" and "enabling" strategies, describing the problems that result when leaders fail to keep a balance. (LMI)

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Leadership Strategies

Larry Lashway

Public anxiety about education continues to test the coping skills of school leaders. On the one hand, principals are expected to run a tight ship, coaxing every bit of performance out of institutions that must cope with limited resources and a rapidly changing society. At the same time, critics call for "reinventing" schools to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

This double-barrelled challenge—which some have compared to changing the tires on a moving vehicle—raises crucial questions about the strategies that principals should use. Does reinventing schools require reinventing leadership? If principals boldly adopt new, untested strategies, do they risk upsetting the fragile equilibrium of their schools? Alternatively, if they rely on time-tested methods that keep their schools running smoothly, will innovation be squelched in the process?

As usual, there is no shortage of advice—much of it contradictory. Just a decade ago, principals were being told to take charge of their schools by exercising forceful instructional leadership; today they are urged to let go of traditional authority roles, becoming facilitators rather than directors.

How should principals respond? Is it best to set one's compass and follow a course unwaveringly, or should the goal be an eclectic approach that borrows from different strategies according to the situation? While the literature offers no consensus on this question, the works reviewed here offer some important insights about the nature and selection of principals' leadership strategies.

Larry Lashway reviews the recent literature on leadership styles and strategies, coming to the conclusion that effective leadership is built on three basic strategies: hierarchical, transformational, and facilitative.

David Conley and Paul Goldman draw on their experience with restructuring school districts to describe the rationale behind facilitative leadership, offering a candid discussion of its advantages and disadvantages.

Terrence Deal discusses strategies that emphasize the leader's role as a manager of meaning, suggesting ways in which to build a school culture that will invite loyalty and commitment.

Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson offer a prescription for reconciling and integrating the multiple demands of technical leadership and symbolic leadership.

Robert F. Kaplan discusses "forceful" and "enabling" strategies, describing the problems that result when leaders fail to keep a balance.

Larry Lashway is an education writer commissioned by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Lashway, Larry. **"Leadership Styles and Strategies."** In *School Leadership: Handbook for Excellence*, Third edition. Edited by Stuart C. Smith and Philip K. Piele: 39-71. Eugene, Ore.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1997. *Available from:* Publications Sales, ERIC/CEM, 5207 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-5207; (800) 438-8841. $19.95 paper plus $4.00 shipping and handling.

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In synthesizing the research on leader behavior, Lashway distinguishes between *style* and *strategy*. Style is a reflection of personal makeup, a set of predispositions that people bring to the job. Strategy is "a consciously chosen pattern of behavior designed to gain the cooperation of followers in accomplishing organizational goals."

Strategies develop from the way leaders view power, as well as from what they notice when they analyze a situation. Power can be seen as *coercive*, resting on the leader's ability to reward or punish followers, or it can be *moral*, dependent on the leader's ability to inspire respect. The principalship automatically brings a certain amount of coercive power, but it also provides ample opportunities for moral leadership. Principals often favor one type of power over the other—a preference that influences the strategies they adopt.

Lashway also notes that leaders don't always see the same things when they scan the environment. Drawing on the work of Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal, he describes four "frames" through which leaders can view events. The *rational* frame focuses on the formal demands of the system, such as goals, policies, and resources. The *human resources* frame considers the human needs of participants. The *symbolic* frame addresses the values, stories, and rituals that provide members with a sense of community. The *political* frame considers the way that participants pursue their own interests. Applying different frames to a situation will lead to different strategies.

The author finds three broad strategies appear in most discussions of leadership. *Hierarchical* strategies involve the familiar top-down approach that emphasizes authority, rules, and division of labor. The leader's role is to make decisions and see that they are carried out efficiently.

Transformational strategies seek to move organizations by engaging the beliefs, values, and aspirations of employees. Leaders become highly sensitive to the symbolic meaning of their actions and pay close attention to organizational culture.

Facilitative strategies aim to broaden the leadership base by empowering teachers to take an active role in school decisions. The leader's role is not so much to make good decisions as to see that good decisions are made.

Lashway discusses the advantages and limitations of each strategy and suggests that all three are necessary for leaders because different problems require different approaches. The goal is not so much to become a certain type of leader, but rather to become a leader who can use strategies in ways that are flexible, appropriate, and effective.

Conley, David T., and Goldman, Paul. **Facilitative Leadership: How Principals Lead without Dominating.** *Oregon School Study Council Bulletin* (August 1994). 52 pages. ED 379 728. *Available from:* Publication Sales, Oregon School Study Council, 5207 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-5207. (800) 438-8841. $7.00 plus $4.00 shipping and handling.

Conley and Goldman provide a concise overview of the nature and uses of *facilitative leadership*, which they define as "the ability to lead without controlling." Their studies of restructuring schools in Oregon are distilled here into a number of propositions about facilitative leadership.

As described by the authors, facilitative leaders are opportunistic, seeking to identify and exploit any openings that will lead to change. They work to create readiness among staff; they foster leadership among teachers and are willing to create new leadership structures; and they are energetic in focusing attention on a shared vision for the school, even when it requires them to let go of their personal visions.

Facilitative leaders willingly share decision-making power, but they are not particularly concerned with formal governance structures. Instead, they are highly pragmatic, sharing power to involve others, but exercising it to keep the school moving ahead. The goal is improvement, not democracy for the sake of democracy.

Conley and Goldman emphasize that facilitative leadership also creates tension and stress because:

- The creation of new leadership upsets the existing social equilibrium.
- Participants may become overly concerned with process at the expense of product.
- Facilitation is energy-intensive; successful facilitation may lead to an explosion of activity that is difficult to monitor.
- Facilitation blurs accountability; even as principals work to share leadership, the system still wants one person to be in charge and bear the responsibility.

Because of these tensions, facilitative principals often feel beleaguered and isolated, and express a need for collegial support networks. Leaders should continually seek out like-minded colleagues wherever they can find them.

The authors concede that facilitation is not the universal answer to school problems, nor can all leaders easily operate in this way. However, they conclude, "there is evidence that truly exceptional things can happen in environments where facilitative leadership is exercised."

Deal, Terrence E. **"Symbols and Symbolic Activity."** In *Images of Schools: Structures and Roles in Organizational Behavior*, edited by Samuel B. Bacharach and Bryan Mundell. Thousand Oaks, Cal.: Corwin Press, 1995. 425 pages. ED 383 089. *Available from:* Corwin Press, Inc., 2455 Teller Rd., Thousand Oaks, CA 91320-2218. (805) 499-0721. $39.95 cloth.

Deal explores the recent interest in organizational culture, endorsing the view that a large part of the leader's job is the management of meaning. Acknowledging that there are still many disputes and unknown aspects of school culture, the author

argues that it plays a crucial role in organizational effectiveness. Schools simply work better when deep-seated myths, beliefs, and assumptions take visible form in rituals, artifacts, and ceremonies. School culture exists whether or not principals pay any attention to it, but consciously nurturing it is the essence of leadership.

Leaders influence culture mostly by appeals to the expressive side of human nature. People are not moved by logical appeals as much as by art, poetry, music, rituals, dance, and story-telling. Expressive activity evokes emotions, touches values, and creates a sense of community, resulting in a dialogue that runs much deeper than ordinary conversation.

Deal provides numerous examples of leaders using symbolic activities. He describes a principal who has revised the orientation program for new teachers; instead of the usual policy briefing, newcomers spend a morning with older colleagues who tell stories about the school.

Another principal, leading an outdoor staff retreat, asked each teacher to write on a piece of wood a personal behavior or attitude he or she would give up to make the school a better place. Teachers read aloud what they had written, and then tossed the wood into a large bonfire, symbolically consuming the negativity.

Deal sees schools as being at an important crossroads. Either they can continue to overemphasize efficiency and rationality, thereby exacting a heavy human toll, or they can regain a sense of spirit by allowing for imagination, playfulness, and celebration.

Deal, Terrence E., and Peterson, Kent D. **The Leadership Paradox: Balancing Logic and Artistry in Schools.** Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1994. 133 pages. ED 371 455. *Available from:* Jossey-Bass, Inc., 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 94104. (415) 433-1767. $28.95 cloth.

Deal and Peterson urge principals to resolve conflicting demands by "embracing paradox" and integrating multiple roles. Their particular concern is the split between the technical and symbolic dimensions of leadership.

The *technical dimension* focuses on the rational, task-oriented side of leadership. As technical leaders, principals spend their time planning, coordinating, supervising, analyzing, and allocating resources.

The *symbolic dimension* is oriented around organizational culture and meaning. In this role, principals function as story-tellers, historians, visionaries, actors, and healers, showing special sensitivity to the power of ceremonies, rites, and rituals.

The authors argue not only that both dimensions are essential, but that they can be blended through "bifocal leadership." That is, alert principals can use seemingly routine technical tasks to build the school's culture. For example:

- Budgeting not only allocates resources, but sends powerful messages about institutional values.
- Faculty meetings can be used to build a common sense of meaning and purpose.
- Bus duty can be an opportunity to assess social climate, reinforce core values, and demonstrate concern for students.

The bifocal approach has special value for schools that are restructuring, since change has both technical and symbolic dimensions. For example, planning obviously requires rational and analytical thinking, but it turns sterile when detached from the underlying school culture. When schools develop goals (quantifiable outcomes), they get polite agreement; when schools develop visions (mental images of a better future), they engage hearts as well as heads.

Acknowledging the complexity of today's educational environment, Deal and Peterson believe that principals will never be able to return to the simple roles of the past. However, through experience and reflection, school leaders can achieve the right balance of "passion and order, faith and results, meaning and measurement."

Kaplan, Robert E. **Forceful Leadership and Enabling Leadership: You Can Do Both.** Greensboro, N.C.: Center for Creative Leadership, 1996. 35 pages. *Available from:* Center for Creative Leadership, One Leadership Place, P.O. Box 26300, Greensboro, NC 27438-6300. (910) 288-7210. $20.00 plus $4.00 shipping and handling.

Kaplan discusses two strategies that he calls "forceful" and "enabling." *Forceful leaders* are competitive, blunt, and assertive, with an intense can-do attitude; they're quick to zero in on what isn't working and fix it. *Enabling leaders* are flexible, cooperative, and sensitive to others, able to stand back and let subordinates show leadership.

Kaplan sees the two strategies as "opposing virtues" that can become vices if they are used indiscriminately or if one becomes too dominant. For example, making judgments is a virtue of forceful leadership, but being harshly judgmental is coun-

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terproductive. Similarly, showing appreciation is important in enabling leadership, but false praise is damaging.

Kaplan has found that many managers have a tendency to overemphasize one side at the expense of the other, either by under-performing on one dimension or over-performing on the other. He cites the case of one leader whose enabling approach was not only carried too far (accepting others' ideas so indiscriminately that his own position was always a mystery) but also crowded out forceful actions that needed to be taken (such as setting standards).

The author sees both dimensions as essential capabilities for leaders. The goal should be versatility (being able to switch rapidly from one mode to the other), not a bland averaging of the two. Effective leaders listen to others, build teams, and foster harmony, but when the time comes to act they can move ahead by making the tough call. Equally important, effective leaders know when to use which approach.

Because the leader's approach is often deeply rooted in his or her experience, developing versatility requires a reexamination of core values and assumptions. Overly forceful leaders must learn to trust others; overly enabling leaders must learn to trust themselves.

Kaplan says that making such changes is difficult; he finds that truly versatile leaders are rare. For that reason, an alternative is staffing for balance: as long as the leadership *team* is versatile, individual variations are less important.

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